BALBEC.

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF THE ARCHITECTS OF IRELAND.

At the ordinary monthly meeting, held on the 16th inst., Mr. William Farrell, V.P., in the chair, some architectural fragments from the ruins of Balbec were produced by Sir Thomas Deane, one of the three vice-presidents of the Institute, who read the following paper on the subject:—

Baalbec, or Balbec, called by the Greeks "Heliopolis, or the City of the Sun," is too familiar to architects and antiquarians to render it necessary that I should detain the meeting with any lengthened description. The city of Baal, or the Sun, is now better known by the Syriac name, "Balbec." It remains in doubt when this city was founded, and though the style of the architecture of the ruins is for the greater part of the Corinthian order, yet the exact period of their erection is not handed down. The building of the Great Temple is attributed to Antoninus Pius, and on several coins of the Roman emperors the Temple of Heliopolis has been struck.

The city is enclosed by a wall encircling the Great Temple, with its courts and fora: a smaller temple, a column, and an unique circular temple, with its exterior entablature sweeping into deep graceful curves, forming concave spaces between detached Corinthian columns, with its walls decorated by niches of peculiarly elegant design. The study of the stupendous ruins of Balbec will well repay the architectural student, whom I refer for ample description to the writings of Pocock, Volney, Bruce, Wood, and Dawkins: the latter visited and measured the ruins in 1751.

The object of my addressing the Institute is to bring to their notice two fragments of architectural sculpture which were presented to me by a gentleman of great intelligence, who visited the ancient city of Balbec — one, a portion of a Corinthian capital; the other, a part of a moulding, with a leaf sculptured thereon. Before I draw the attention of the meeting to the peculiarity of these specimens, I would endeavour, as it were, to fit or prepare our minds by dwelling on some of the details of the Balbec temples.

The Great Temple is 290 feet long, 160 feet wide, has 10 columns in front and 19 at the side. The height to the top of the pediment is 120 feet, the columns are 7 feet 10 inches in diameter, the entablature 11 feet 9 inches high. The columns are of one stone. Volney says "of a white granite, with large shining veins like gypsum." The more ornamental parts were carved out of a coarse white marble brought from a quarry west of the city. Some of the stones employed are of immense size. There are in one part of the foundation three stones, which make in their united length 182 feet by 12 feet thick. In one quarry there remains an unfinished stone nearly 70 feet in length and 14 feet square.

My reason for giving dimensions is to induce a contrast in the mind with the pigmy architecture of our country, with its oft ill-applied columns, from 3 to 4 feet diameter. How noble must the temple be whose columns remain to this day in majestic grandeur of double these diameters: let us realise in our thoughts columns nearly 80 feet in height, nineteen in number, at the side of a temple! However, I must not mislead as to great general dimensions being always necessary to produce sublimity. A Greek Doric temple, from beauty of form—beauty as well as greatness of parts,—with obvious simplicity of structure, is universally allowed to be sublime, yet the general dimensions of the Parthenon and of the Temple of Theseus are small. We have it stated, and truly so, by Mr. E. L. Garbett, that "no Gothic building ever possessed a particle of sublimity, unless double the extent and treble the height of an ordinary Doric temple:" here there is sublimity by totally different means.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his Discourses on Art, says,—"The more extensive your acquaintance is with the works of those who have excelled, the more extensive will be your powers of invention; and, what may appear still more like a paradox, the more original will be your conceptions." I truly believe in this observation, and therefore urge on all to study ancient art abroad and at home. It is with these feelings I would approach the ruins of Balbec; with these feelings (in this necessarily conversational paper) I lay before the Institute the fragments of sculpture I have alluded to.

In both of these specimens you will discover exalted mind in the composition—a peculiar adherence to characteristic nature—a power of producing effect by simple means, rarely in our day acquired or applied. This, you will perceive, is by an artistic use of the drill. I mean by an artistic use, a feeling for, and knowledge of, art in the workman, which produces that indescribable feeling best expressed by what may be termed the poetry of art.

In all sculpture drilling the points for what is called "boasting" has ever been applied; but in the specimens under consideration the drill has been otherwise used in the formation of foliage, and producing effect by deep shadows and undercutting, but all by a master hand, knowing and feeling his subject.

To elevate our minds to the beautiful in art has been this evening my object. When I consider that the standard I have brought before you is a work executed 1,400 years back, as sharp as the day it was wrought, so natural, so beautiful, my mind turns to the past with wonder—to the present and future, with hope of improvement — an improvement to be attained by the principles I have taken the liberty to put forth; by mutual good feeling—mutual instruction—and teachable minds,—the exhibition by every means, and at all times, to the artisan of the highest models of antique and modern art. The British Institute of Architects, our own with some vigour infused into it—the Dublin Society, a school of design established years before the present schools of design were thought of, now so nobly followed up by Government, disposed to act in the arts, when we are disposed to help ourselves. These united means must bring about a better feeling for the fine arts, so that in the end good taste will be conspicuous in every art and manufacture.

The Corporation of Cork have wisely contributed in aid of the school of design—they wisely look to the future effect of first principles being well grounded. The Corporation of Dublin, so nobly constituted, no doubt will follow the example. I fear that I have digressed, that I have ridden my hobby, the advancement of the fine arts—a love for, and knowledge of which, I trust, ere long, will pervade all ranks of society, and that in ages to come the productions of our time may be looked on with the same pleasure, that I have no doubt you have felt on the inspection of the fragments of Balbec sculpture I have had the honour of laying before the Institute this evening.

A discussion followed.

According to *Saunders's News Letter*, it is expected that the institutes of engineers and architects will be able speedily to obtain some suitable premises, which they can conveniently occupy in common; and we hope that this very desirable end may soon be realised, being satisfied that the non-professional public will often derive much pleasure and instruction when invited to attend the meetings of the institute.

COMPETITION—SOUTH METROPOLITAN SCHOOL BOARD.

In the month of May last, advertisements were issued for competition designs by the *South Metropolitan School Board*, and between fifty and sixty designs were submitted. The plans were delivered on the 16th of July, and in about two months afterwards my designs were returned to me; but up to this period, through your publication or any other, I have not seen any information as to the building being proceeded with, or who was the successful competitor. But I am informed, upon private authority, how true it may be I cannot say, that the idea of building altogether is abandoned.

Would you oblige me, and I dare say the other unfortunate competitors will be also obliged, by stating if you have heard anything upon the subject?*

I am quite alive to the truth of the remarks which have appeared at various times in your valuable journal relative to competitions, and the great and palpable injustice to which architects so quietly submit, and I would gladly be one in endeavouring to establish a more substantial and respectable footing for the profession.

Supposing, in this case to which I have called your attention, fifty or sixty gentlemen have submitted designs, each of which would take on an average from five to six weeks' labour, and an expenditure of from 5*l.* to 10*l.*, and the committee, for some cause or other, do not proceed with the building, and they consequently return all the plans without selecting any. Is there no remedy? Are we quietly to submit to such a barefaced act of injustice?

Surely there must be some obligation on their part, or at least I understood so, or I should not have been induced to have expended my time and labour in preparing designs; and the obligation I take to be this,—that they make a selection of some one of the designs submitted, and if the author be a competent person, that he should be engaged to carry out the works; but provided circumstances should arise over which they had no control, and the building were not proceeded with, then that he should receive such remuneration according to the usual charges in the profession. But supposing they do not think there is any such obligation on their part, what then—are we quietly to submit?

We might not be able to succeed in law, but we could in equity, and I would gladly subscribe my 5*l.* towards the prosecution of such a suit, to prove to such men that we are not to be treated with greater indignity and injustice than any other class of her Majesty's subjects.

But perhaps I am wrong in this particular instance, although there have been too many such cases, and I should be glad to obtain any information on the subject.

T. S. Edwards.

* We have not.—Ed.

BUILDING ACCIDENTS.

Islington Sewer.—On Friday in last week two men were drowned in a sewer at Lower-road, Islington, by a rush of water from the bottom of the New River tunnel there, while attempting, against the regulations of the Sewers Commission, to open a communication into the sewer from a house-drain in the course of formation at the King's Head public-house. The sewer itself was a new one, but had been safely cut across the New River tunnel at a lower level, and the sewerwork was at a stand for want of blue bricks. One of the workmen of the commission, meanwhile, had contracted with Mr. Kesteven, builder, to work at the drain, and was so at work when the accident took place. In his evidence at the coroner's inquest, he stated that he did not know where the waterwork tunnel lay, and supposed that he had got beyond it. In course of some boring to ascertain his position the water rushed in, it was believed from the bottom of the aqueduct, the invert of which is supposed to be only one brick thick, and is very old—as old indeed as the New River cut altogether. Being asked by whose authority he acted in this particular instance, the witness alluded to, (Bevan) asserted that he acted on no one's authority but his own,—that Mr. Kesteven had gone to the Sewers Office to obtain leave to open the communication, and that he merely went in "to try and get the thing done." Mr. Forster, the engineer of the commission, volunteered a statement to the coroner and jury to the effect that the tunnel being 250 years old, it might have been unsound, and the company were now constructing an iron tube to go under it; that he attributed the falling-in to an accident, and not to any negligence, although Mr. Kesteven had no authority to carry the drain as far as he did. The coroner said in that case there was no necessity to adjourn. The jury acquiesced, and returned a verdict of *Accidental Death.**

New Chinese Exhibition Building.—For some time past a building of considerable extent for the Chinese Exhibition has been in course of construction near Albert-gate, Hyde-park; and about the hour for leaving off work for the week, on Saturday last, a number of

* By this lamentable accident two widows and nine young children are left totally destitute. An effort is being made to place the widows in a position that will enable them to support themselves and their children. Mr. Henry John, of No. 66, Hatton Garden, has consented to act as treasurer, and will receive any subscriptions that may be offered.

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